

News Release

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Survey data shows effects of cuts to education

MADISON — With 83 percent of school districts responding, survey data gathered this fall shows the vast majority of students are attending schools that cut staff, meaning there are fewer adults in Wisconsin public schools helping children learn.

Conducted this fall, the survey by the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) found a net reduction of 3,368 kindergarten through 12th-grade staff members in responding districts. This figure matches a recent report by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development that estimated a loss of roughly 4,000 jobs in K-12 education. Half of responding school districts reported they buffered staffing cuts with one-time federal stimulus money through the federal Education Jobs Act, funding that will not be available next year. Two-thirds of responding districts said they expected to make the same or greater cuts next year.

“Budgets have consequences and the 2011-13 state budget made sweeping changes to funding for public schools,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “It’s no surprise that school districts balanced their budgets; they always do, even under 18 years of revenue limits. It is clear this year that districts had to cut staff, eliminate vital support services, and reduce course offerings, narrowing educational opportunities for Wisconsin’s school children.”

The WASDA data showed that

- A much higher number of jobs were lost in the K-12 sector than under prior years of budget cuts. Wisconsin has 1,655 fewer teachers, 172 fewer administrators, 765 fewer aides, and 776 fewer support staff working in schools in districts responding to the survey. Net cuts were two to three times greater for the current school year than in 2010-11. The 2011-12 staffing cuts were double the combined cuts in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. Newly hired teachers and staff are younger and less experienced and have fewer veteran teachers to rely on due to retirements.
- Four in 10 students attend a district with larger class sizes in grades K-6; 90 percent of students attend a district that had a net staff loss in one of the four categories surveyed. These cuts mean students have fewer opportunities to take career and technical education classes. Districts also are offering fewer art, music, physical education, Advanced Placement, and foreign language classes. Forty percent of students are in districts that eliminated sections or increased class size for the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

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- Essential support programs were cut, and roughly three in four students attend a district reducing at least one such program; one in five students attend a district that cut five or more of these programs. The biggest cuts were to special education programs (100 of responding districts), followed by library and media center staff, reading coordinators, programs for at-risk youth, and drug and alcohol abuse programs.

“The 2011-13 biennial budget has already had a profound effect on the services delivered to public school students,” said Miles Turner, WASDA executive director. “A majority of Wisconsin students attend a school district with fewer teachers, larger class sizes, fewer support programs, and fewer course offerings. Most districts expect next year’s budget will be worse.”

The survey analysis noted that the 2011-13 state budget cut general school aids by \$749 million over the biennium. The budget also reduced revenue limit per pupil by 5.5 percent in FY12, which translates to \$1.6 billion in lost revenue authority from prior statute for the state’s 424 school districts; eliminated several revenue limit exemptions such as school nursing, pupil transportation, safety equipment, and funds for school security officers; and reduced nearly all categorical aids by 10 percent, in addition to eliminating some programs outright.

Evers called for implementation of his “Fair Funding for Our Future” plan to reform the way Wisconsin funds its schools. “We must stop the erosion of quality documented in the WASDA survey and rebuild Wisconsin’s tradition of excellent public schools,” Evers said. “We must implement meaningful school finance reform and make a serious investment in public education.”

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NOTE: The Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators has been conducting an annual survey since revenue limits were put in place in 1993-94 school year. This year’s survey, *Cuts in Staff, Programs, and Services for the 2011-12 School Year*, was conducted in fall and was supported by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. A copy of an early analysis of the data is available at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/wasdasurveyresults_nov11.pdf. The final report is available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/wasdasurveyresults.pdf> and a copy of the survey and maps depicting the 2011-13 budget impact are available on the department’s budget webpage http://dpi.wi.gov/pb/11-13_budget.html. This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2011_127.pdf.